

IS AN ORAL COLLEGE NEEDED ?

IN the last annual report of the Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, the President of the Board of Directors, Mr. Emlen Hutchinson, states that several recent graduates of the Oral Department of that Institution have been admitted to high schools and universities for the hearing, and adds :

“If these pupils are able thus to receive instruction along with hearing pupils, certainly their advancement would be much more rapid, if their higher education could be pursued in an Oral College for the Deaf, where pupils who have been taught by the oral method might enjoy its continuance. The establishment of such a college is well worthy of earnest consideration by the ablest instructors of the deaf.”

Believing that under this invitation one may be included who makes no claim to be among the ablest instructors, but only to be one of somewhat extended experience, I venture to offer a few suggestions to the readers of the *Annals* on the subject Mr. Hutchinson brings so pointedly to the notice of our profession.

Reading between the lines of the paragraph just quoted one perceives that the position of the oral graduates of the Mt. Airy School in educational institutions for the hearing is not wholly satisfactory ; but that is not the point to which consideration is invited, so I will not discuss it.

The desideratum is a place for the higher education of deaf young people “ where pupils who have been taught by the oral method may enjoy its continuance.”

Under the date of March 5, 1892, Dr. A. L. E. Crouter, then, as now, the executive head of the Mt. Airy School, addressed me a letter, printed in the *Silent World*, in which he informed me that the matter of the higher education of

the orally taught deaf had been recently discussed in a meeting of the Directors of the American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf. "As you are aware," said Dr. Crouter, "Mr. Greenberger, at our meeting at Washington, brought up the question of oral instruction (recitations) for oral students at Kendall Green, maintaining that, in a school supported by the national government, equal educational advantages and privileges should be accorded to the orally taught deaf and to the manually taught deaf, pursuing oral methods in the education of the former, manual methods with the latter. In bringing up the subject, Mr. Greenberger disclaimed any unfriendly feeling towards the College, and I wish to do him the justice to state that he had no desire to embarrass you in your noble work, but, moved by a sense of justice, he felt that the time had come when the Association should take a stand in favor of the higher oral education of the orally taught deaf of the country, in the College at Kendall Green if possible; if impossible, then outside in a separate school. Now, while the question was disposed of, for the time being at least, in a way that exhibited the kindest feeling toward you and your college work, I feel that sooner or later it will have to be met and disposed of to the advantage of the College, or to its disadvantage, strengthening it if an oral department be added, weakening it if, refused in what they believe to be just demands, the friends of higher oral instruction for the deaf establish a separate college for their higher education. The oral instruction of the deaf, whether wisely or unwisely, is unquestionably commanding increased public attention and public sympathy, and the college that seeks to provide the highest and best educational facilities for the deaf as a class should stand ready to meet every reasonable demand. The number of orally taught deaf is constantly increasing; they are seeking higher instruction than the primary schools afford; where shall they obtain it?

“They hesitate, and object, and refuse when directed to Kendall Green, not because it is not a good school, nor because its professors are not competent men, *but because of a well-founded fear that that which they have spent much time and labor in gaining—namely their speech and their ability to read speech—may be very seriously impaired.* Shall this class of deaf-mutes come to Kendall Green to profit by instruction at the hands of its able and experienced professors, greatly strengthening the power and influence of the College, or shall they be driven to another school?”

I have underlined a certain passage in Dr. Crouter's letter which plainly discloses the ground on which oral recitations were demanded in the College at Washington for such orally taught students as might seek admission.

In my reply to Dr. Crouter's letter, which was published in the *Silent World* April 7, 1892, I said:

“It is not true, as the uninformed reader would infer from your letter, that the orally taught deaf of the country have never enjoyed the advantages of the College. Pupils from the Clarke Institution, from the Boston Day-School, from private oral schools, from Mr. Greenberger's school, and last, but not least, a pupil who had for several years the special training of Professor Alexander Graham Bell, have been connected with our College for longer or shorter periods, one of them graduating with honor from our scientific course. None of these students enjoyed the advantages of oral recitations in the College. They had no special teaching in speech or lip-reading. They did, however, have considerable practice in speech while connected with the College.

“No complaints came to me from these pupils, nor from any of their friends, while they were with us or after they left us, that their powers of speech and lip-reading were even temporarily, much less permanently, impaired by their connection with the College. The father of one of

Mr. Greenberger's pupils, who was for two years a student here, writes under date of March 29, 1892: 'In reply to your inquiry, I desire to say that H. did not speak quite as well on his return, perhaps because that at college he had not as much chance to use his lips as he did while at school in New York, but since he is home, our conversation at home, as well as in our business with him, is so frequent that I am happy to say he speaks as well and as understandingly as ever.'

"The father of another of Mr. Greenberger's pupils who pursued our full scientific course, taking the bachelor's degree, says in a letter just received: 'I do not think my son's power of speech and ability to read the lips were injured in the least by his taking a course in your institution.'

"Four others of the orally taught pupils to whom I have just referred have informed me within a few days that on the testimony of their friends they experienced no permanent injury to their powers of speech and of lip-reading in consequence of their connection with the College. And the friends of two of these thought their speech improved while they were in college.

"Now, in considering the cases of these orally taught pupils to whom reference has been made, it must be kept in mind that they were all connected with the College at periods when no instruction in speech and lip-reading was afforded to any student. And yet it appears that not one of these young people, representing as they did the leading oral schools of the country, suffered any permanent injury to their powers of speech and lip-reading while students here. What more convincing proof could be given that the 'fears' of the oralists voiced in your letter are not 'well founded'? And if these fears are justly dissipated by the records of times when no articulation teaching was afforded in the College they surely need be accorded little weight at present, when ten in-

structors are actively engaged in giving daily lessons in speech and lip-reading to the students of the College. In view of the unprecedented facilities for oral teaching, newly offered in the College the present year, and which will be continued next year, will it not be safe to intrust orally taught pupils to us for a year or two, or at least until it can be demonstrated that our way of preserving and improving their speech is a failure? For if it prove a failure, no one will be readier than I to accept such a result, and to advocate what you believe to be 'the more excellent way.'"

"The unprecedented facilities for oral teaching" which were introduced into the College in the autumn of 1891 were continued, and results wholly satisfactory were set forth in our report, bearing date October 14, 1892. The paragraph on this subject closed as follows:

"It is the purpose of the directors to provide means for the preservation, unimpaired, of any power to speak and read from the lips, which any student may bring to the College.

"If the measures now employed fail of this result, others will be resorted to; and should it become at any time evident that the interests of any considerable number in the College would be advanced by the establishment of classes in which the recitations should be conducted orally, the means for providing such classes will be sought."

'During the years 1893, '4, and '5 a number of orally taught students have been connected with the College. These have had special and often individual training and practice in speech and lip-reading to an extent sufficient not merely to preserve the speech power they brought with them, but in some cases to improve it.

But this is a small part, only, of what our large corps of articulation teachers has accomplished in the College. Many students who came to us without speech have acquired valuable proficiency therein. Many more whose

speech power was limited have made great improvement, and since September, 1891, *every student in the College desiring instruction or training in speech has had it.* During the current year sixty-two students out of our total number of eighty are enjoying regular training in speech.

But beyond all this, in order to remove every possible objection on the part of the orally taught or their friends to the methods pursued in Gallaudet College, its officers have signified their readiness to provide oral recitations whenever sufficient numbers of orally taught pupils to justify the formation of classes should present themselves.

This offer was made to the American Association to Promote the Teaching of Speech to the Deaf at Chautauqua, in 1894, and renewed as follows in a circular of the College in April, 1895:

“It has been a matter of regret to the authorities of the College that the number of orally taught deaf youth seeking admission has not been larger than it has. Without doubt, very many to whom the training of the College would have proved a source of great happiness and advantage have needlessly failed to secure for themselves benefits freely afforded by a beneficent government.

“And it may be said in this connection that should orally taught deaf young men and women seek admission to the College in sufficient numbers to justify and demand the organization of orally taught classes, such classes will be provided for.”

I think I have made it clear that the “desideratum” of the Directors of the Pennsylvania Institution for the orally taught can be fully secured in the College at Washington. And perhaps this could be taken as a sufficient answer to the question asked in the title to this paper. But there are other considerations which should not be lost sight of.

It will not be necessary, I think, to bring forward statistics to show that for a number of years to come the

number of deaf young men and women in the United States capable of pursuing a college course of study to advantage can be well provided for in a single institution.

The provisions made by the Federal Government and private benefactions for the College at Washington, as to buildings and grounds, are ample for a larger number of students than are now in attendance. And the benevolent disposition of Congress as to free scholarships, which include board without charge to students unable to pay, has been too clearly shown in the past to leave any doubt as to the willingness of the Government to offer the higher education to *all* the deaf youth of the country who may be capable of receiving it.

The justice of Dr. Crouter's contention that "in a school supported by the National Government equal advantages and privileges should be accorded to the orally taught deaf and to the manually taught deaf" has never been questioned by the authorities of the College. On the contrary, the statements of this article make plain their purpose and their ability to afford to orally taught deaf youth, not only all the educational advantages at their command, but every help needed to preserve unimpaired the valuable acquisitions of speech and lip-reading they may have secured in school.

That this has been done for the considerable number of orally taught students who have come to us could easily be shown by their testimony and that of their friends. That it would be done for all others who may seek admission there need be no doubt.

A number of reasons could be added to show that the establishment of an oral college for the deaf is not to be desired, but I think a further discussion of the question is hardly called for at this time.

I trust I have made it clear that the authorities of Gallaudet College stand ready to satisfy every reasonable demand which the friends of the orally taught deaf can

make in their behalf, as possible students in the College. And I hope it is equally evident that for any loss to this class of deaf youth, growing out of their failure to claim their rights in the College, they and their friends, and not the management of the College, are responsible.

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